

Jones said he recognizes the irony that someone in Virginia might be receiving food stamps because he lost a job through outsourcing. "In an ideal world, I wish we could have a call center in Virginia staffed by present or former food-stamp clients," he said.

Food-stamp coupons are not longer given out. The federal government now issues electronic benefit-transfer (EBT) cards, which operate much like debit cards.

A food-stamp recipient gets a card from the state Department of Social Services with a limit on how much the person can draw. J.P. Morgan handles the monetary transfers for a fee paid by the state.

J.P. Morgan has call centers in Bangalore and Pune, India, and a center for automated calls in Delaware, Jones said. He said only about 10,000 of the 400,000 monthly calls made by Virginians go to India, where people handle the inquiries. The rest go to the automated call center.

Repeated calls for comment to J.P. Morgan Chase & Co. in New York City were not returned.

[From the Associated Press]

PRIVATE CONTRACTORS MAY HANDLE FOOD STAMPS

(By Ira Dreyfuss)

WASHINGTON.—The Agriculture Department says it would consider letting a state hire private contractors to sign up people for food stamps, even though federal law says government workers should handle the job.

Eric Bost, undersecretary for food nutrition and consumers, raised the prospect Wednesday after the issue came up at a hearing before the House appropriations subcommittee on agriculture.

If a state has a better way to provide services and save money, "it would be foolhardy on our part not to at least consider it," Bost told reporters. Florida Gov. Jeb Bush has directed his state Department of Children and Families to see if nongovernment workers could handle applications for food stamps, as well as Medicaid and other Welfare benefits.

While the governors's proposal envisions a U.S. contractor with American employees handling Florida's food stamp signups, some states already have contracted to have overseas operators handled complaint and service calls regarding their food stamp programs.

Because the Florida project would be limited—a test to see if the concept would work—Bost said he could waive the requirement that food stamp signups be handled by government workers. But allowing all states to do so would require a change in law, he said.

Food stamp beneficiaries in 43 states already get help with problems such as replacing lost cards by calling toll-free numbers of companies that are contracted by states to operate help lines. Some of these contracts "outsource" calls overseas, but it is unclear how many.

Outsourcing of jobs has become a political issue after President Bush's chief economic adviser said it benefits the economy, a position that was challenged by leaders in both parties this election year.

Rep. Marcy Kaptur of Ohio, the senior Democrat on the House subcommittee, said at the hearing that the Agriculture Department should be prohibiting all outsourcing of food stamp calls.

Rep. Allen Boyd, D-Fla., another member of the subcommittee, said he doesn't "understand how you would determine food stamp eligibility without a face-to-face interview."

Easy, responded Bost. "We have got such sophistication in this country that potentially I can get a loan for a couple of hundred thousand dollars and never see anybody face to face," Bost said.

MAKING AMERICA ENERGY INDEPENDENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Idaho (Mr. OTTER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. OTTER. Madam Speaker, those of us lucky enough to live in Idaho and the Northwest are blessed. Besides the unmatched beauty and the incredible quality of life we enjoy, our rivers provide us with relatively abundant and affordable hydropower that gives us a competitive advantage in the world marketplace.

As residents of an arid State, my Idaho colleagues and I know better than to take it for granted. Yet despite being a Nation that depends too heavily on foreign sources of fossil fuels, America for too long has taken energy for granted. We have gone a dozen years now without a national energy policy. The time to change that is now.

As our economic recovery picks up steam, it is more important than ever that the United States maintain an abundant and reliable energy supply; and, frankly, we are not going to achieve that without the kind of comprehensive national energy policy already passed three times in this House.

While the recent rise in energy costs has caught many consumers by surprise, it is important to remember that the energy supplies and price concerns are nothing new. Many of us in Congress, especially on this side of the aisle, along with energy industry observers and analysts, have long been warning of the energy train wreck that is about to happen.

And it is not just about oil and gas. A national energy policy must address a relicensing process for hydropower dams that has become a cumbersome and inordinately expensive proposition. It must make a sound commitment to alternative energy production and provide reasonable incentives for market-driven conservation, and it must set the stage for a new generation of safe and more efficient nuclear reactors that could further improve our energy independence.

Indeed, I am more optimistic than ever about the potential for nuclear power. One of the ways in which we can reverse the mistakes of the past decade and start down the right track toward a stable domestic energy marketplace is through the expanded use of clean nuclear energy.

Nuclear power stands out as an obvious answer to the many energy-related challenges we now face. Back home, the Idaho National Energy Engineering and Environmental Laboratory and the Argonne National Laboratory-West are working on the next generation of nuclear reactors. Their vision for nuclear energy is one that will provide America's energy consumers with a cheap, reliable, environmentally friendly and inherently safe source of electricity as far into the future as the human mind can envision.

I believe that the Idaho labs are headed in the right direction, and I am

committed to helping them achieve their mission to enhance our Nation's nuclear power capabilities. I want to share with Members just a few reasons why I believe in the potential for nuclear power.

First, nothing is burned in a nuclear reactor, so there are no emissions into the atmosphere. In fact, nuclear energy is responsible for over a 90 percent reduction in the greenhouse gas emissions coming from the energy industry since 1973.

Between 1973 and 1996, nuclear power accounted for emissions reductions of 34.6 million tons of nitrogen oxide and 80.2 million tons of sulfur dioxide, and over the past 10 years nuclear plants have produced over 5 trillion kilowatt hours of electricity production, with absolutely zero carbon dioxide, sulfur dioxide or particulate matter emissions. Beyond those benefits, existing and emerging technologies will solve the complexities of storing and recycling spent nuclear fuels.

Second, nuclear power is a safe, reliable abundant source of power. Not only does the world contain plenty of resources for fueling nuclear reactors, but existing and emerging technologies will provide even greater efficiencies in the use of nuclear fuel.

Finally, nuclear energy is a home-grown technology. Thanks to the men and women who have worked in Idaho's labs over the past 5 decades, our Nation has long been the world leader in nuclear technology and continues to be the world's largest consumer of nuclear energy.

□ 1915

The bottom line is this: Without a comprehensive national energy policy, America is a nation at risk.

Congress must act decisively to send President Bush a blueprint for lowering natural gas prices, creating jobs, and making us more independent and secure. Only then will America be the architects of their own destiny.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Ms. GINNY BROWN-WAITE) Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Oregon (Mr. DEFAZIO) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. DEFAZIO addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

INVESTING IN AMERICA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Madam Speaker, I want to follow the chain of thought of the distinguished gentleman from Ohio and indicate the importance of focusing on employing America.

I am very proud to be able to salute a businessperson in my community by the name of Anthony Chase, who

speaks directly to the comment of the gentlewoman from Ohio (Ms. KAPTUR) about call centers, which really have become the engine of economic opportunity for many citizens here in the United States. There happen to be occasions for banks, credit card companies, and a number of other businesses in America to use these call centers.

I just want to emphasize that we are a world economy, we are an integrated world. But I also think it is important that we look to recruit not only American businesses, but American workers, to be able to do work that is viable for uplifting our own inner city and rural communities. Mr. Chase has a company that hires hundreds of persons who work in a call center and secure business for a number of our companies in the Nation, and he hopes to recruit companies from around the world.

We have to balance the responsibilities of making sure that Americans are at work, of keeping American jobs, of rebuilding a manufacturing economy along with our international economy and international friendship.

In particular, I want to talk about Houston, Texas, because one of the reasons I am concerned about the journey that this Congress is taking of not being concerned about jobs and not being concerned about infusing moneys into the domestic economy is because Americans are growing, and the communities are diverse, but the work is not growing commensurate with the population. The needs of America are growing, one in particular, and I will cite Houston, Texas because we are a microcosm of the struggle of improving the transportation and mobility of this Nation.

For over 20 years, Houston has been fighting to secure the opportunity to have light rail. It is located in a 3-million-to-4-million-person metroplex, and I cannot cite for my colleagues the traffic jams in Houston, Texas. We are trying to get better.

Unfortunately, we have had great opposition fighting against us in getting light rail right in our own community. But I am very proud of Houston because in November 2003 we voted to put in place light rail, first a 22-mile and then a 39-mile light rail track.

Why am I speaking about it? Because just yesterday, the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, under the gentleman from Alaska (Chairman YOUNG) and the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. OBERSTAR), the ranking member, gave Houston one more step toward completion of its light rail.

What does that do for Houston? What does that do for America? It creates jobs and provides the opportunity for people in this Nation to help build trains, to help build tracks, to help build a system, the technology, and to increase mobility.

I hope that in our effort to secure funding for our light rail and the authorization for our light rail, that we will have Members of our congressional

delegation, House and Senate, who will pay attention to the vote of the people of Houston. They have voted, they have spoken, and we want to have a unified effort in fighting for light rail in Houston, Texas.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to working with the mayor of the city of Houston, Mayor White, and the chairman of the Metro Board, Mr. Wolffe, who I inquired of the board's commitment to continue our light rail effort. I wanted to thank the previous board and thank the previous or existing Executive Director, Shirley Delibro, who will be passing the mantle on to another director.

But in this climate of lack of jobs, it is imperative that we support the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure as it looks to rebuild highways and freeways and roads in America in our urban and rural areas. That is where we can insist on jobs in America, with the buses, the trains, the airplanes that are covered by this transportation bill. We can encourage the utilization of American companies in providing for the improvement of our transportation system, putting America back to work, utilizing the backdrop of World War II and the aftermath of the depression, when the phrase was, a chicken in every pot and that was all that you would get.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt came in with a wise vision, putting people back to work and rebuilding America's infrastructure, and it worked. So many of us know those whose children, their economic opportunity was built upon the WPA, sweeping the streets, paving the streets, looking toward the visionary of new visions and roads.

Madam Speaker, it is imperative that we do that today, and I hope this Congress will support TEA 21 and vote to invest in America and create jobs.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. PENCE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. PENCE addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. FILNER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. FILNER addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BURTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. BURTON of Indiana addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gen-

tleman from Washington (Mr. MCDERMOTT) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. MCDERMOTT addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

INVESTING IN AMERICA'S FUTURE: CONGRESSIONAL BLACK CAUCUS FISCAL YEAR 2005 BUDGET AL- TERNATIVE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. CUMMINGS) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. CUMMINGS. Madam Speaker, I rise this evening to discuss the Congressional Black Caucus's fiscal year 2005 budget alternative.

Today, the Congressional Black Caucus offered a budget substitute that would invest in America's future while restoring fiscal responsibility in fulfilling our shared sacrifice.

Madam Speaker, when we are in a state of war, finding ourselves, even as we speak, with men and women in our armed forces fighting in Afghanistan and fighting in Iraq, and finding themselves spread out across the globe, the Congressional Black Caucus, which has consistently over and over and over again reiterated that we certainly support our troops and, at the same time, we are very firm on the fact that we must address the issue of terrorism.

But we also say that we must have a budget that is balanced, not only from the standpoint of economics, but also from the standpoint of doing for the people in the United States, people who work hard every day; people who give their blood, sweat, and tears to making this country the best that it can be; people who cannot even watch this on CSPAN because they left a job at 5 o'clock today and went to another job because ends simply are not meeting.

And not only those people, but 9 million people who are not watching this because they do not have cable, and the reason why they do not have cable is because they do not have a job. Nine million of them, at the end of every 2-week period when they normally would have gotten a check, they are not getting a check anymore, because they are simply unemployed.

Madam Speaker, despite the best efforts of over 100 of my colleagues in the House of Representatives, our budget substitute, that is the budget substitute of the Congressional Black Caucus, did not pass.

But one thing is clear, as I have said to the caucus many, many times, when I borrowed the words from former Representative Bill Clay, when he said to the caucus back in September, he said, you may not win every battle, but you will set the trend. You may not get what you want at that moment, but hopefully, we will be able to plant a seed in the minds of not only Members of this Congress, but in the minds of